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The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

C/NIC CHRONO

National Intelligence Council

NIC 01705-84
14 March 1984

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence
Chairman, National Intelligence Council

FROM: Herbert E. Meyer
Vice Chairman, National Intelligence Council

SUBJECT: Abortions in the Soviet Bloc: What They Mean

1. Romania's Nicolai Ceausescu last week reported in a widely publicized speech that of 742,000 recorded pregnancies in 1983, 420,000 were aborted. This works out to an official abortion rate of 57%. Since it is inevitable that some pregnancies went unrecorded that were later aborted, the real percentage must be higher.

2. For comparable figures on the Soviet Union, I checked with Murray Feshbach, who as you know is the West's leading Soviet-bloc demographer. Feshbach estimates that the abortion rate for the USSR as a whole is between 60% and 70%. Among Slavs and Balts, who comprise 80% of the Soviet population, the abortion rate is 75% to 80%.

-- According to a Soviet medical journal published in July 1983, a survey of 400 women in Russia's Tambov oblast--women who had had at least one induced abortion--showed that these women had each undergone between one and 28 abortions, with 5% of the women undergoing 11 or more abortions.

3. In the United States, the abortion rate is 30%.

4. I don't think we can attribute these staggering Soviet-bloc abortion rates entirely to the low quality of available birth-control products and to decisions by sensible, practical parents to limit the size of their families simply because their apartments lack sufficient floor space for comfort. Rather, I believe that we should view these abortion rates, at least partly, as an indication of the average couple's judgment on life in Communist societies. Indeed, these abortion rates reflect a vision of the future that is bleak and despairing almost to the point of national suicide.

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5. The above statistics and their implications will be addressed in our forthcoming NIE on political and economic pressures within the USSR.

6. Since these statistics all are public, you may wish to make them available to policymakers for use in their own public statements.

Herbert E. Meyer

cc: NIO/USSR-EE
A/NIO/USSR-EE
NIC/AG

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